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Remembering D-Day

Our readers were there.



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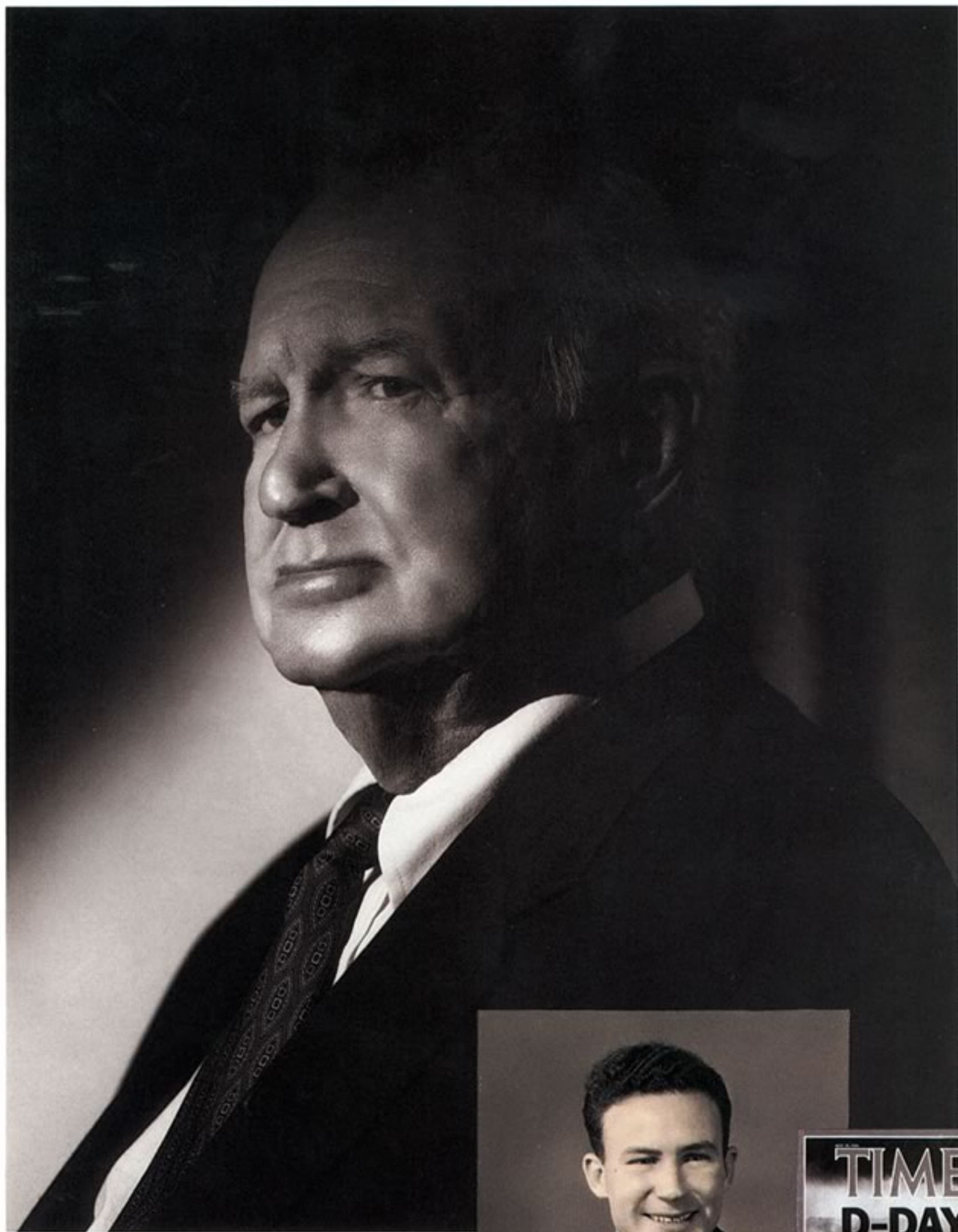
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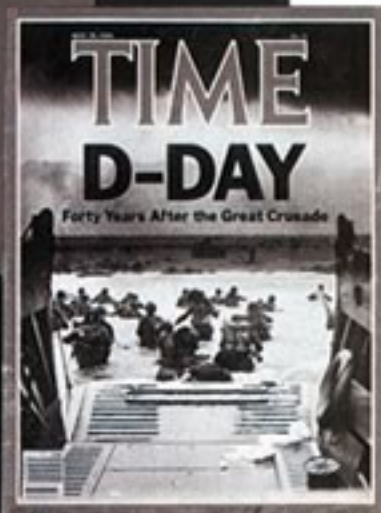
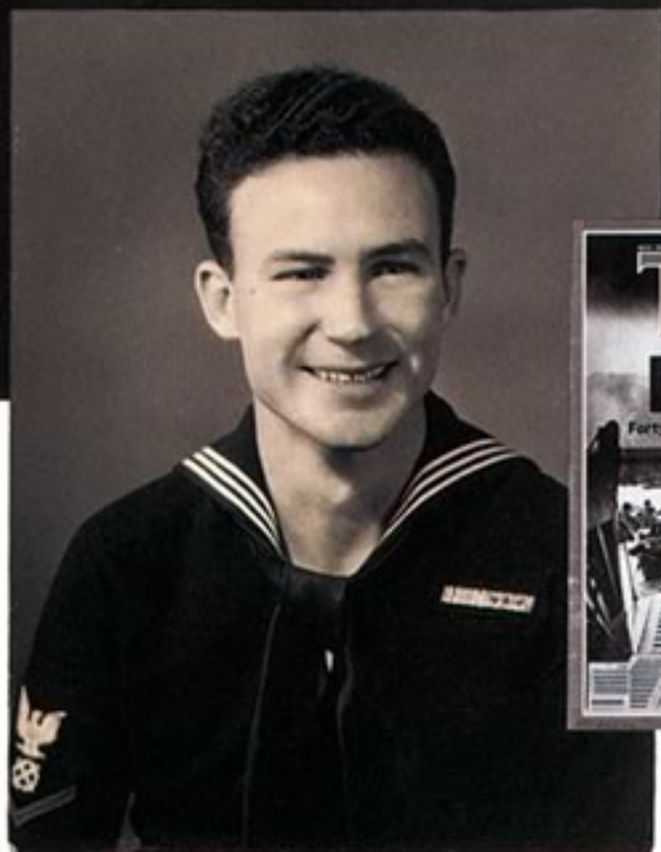



On June 6, 1944, when the Allied troops landed in Normandy, Associate Club members were there. And whether they parachuted toward the enemy in the dark, piloted a heavy bomber to destroy a German rail yard, or beached a landing craft onto sands raked by machine-gun fire, it was a day that would change them forever.



BELOW: COPYRIGHT 1984, TIME INC. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION. LEFT: MARK A. VICIRA

AFTER HE DELIVERED THE TROOPS TO OMAHA BEACH ON D-Day, RAY P. JOHNSON (RIGHT, AT THE TIME, AND ABOVE, TODAY) HAD ONE THOUGHT: "GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE!" THE PHOTO USED 40 YEARS LATER ON THE COVER OF *TIME* WAS TAKEN FROM HIS LANDING CRAFT.





On June 5 at 4:15 a.m., General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the U.S. Army, sat in a library in England with British General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery and the American and British chiefs of staff. "I would say — go," said Montgomery.

Eisenhower thought a moment before announcing, "I don't see how we can possibly do anything else." With those words he set into motion the largest amphibious military operation in history: The D-Day cross-channel invasion of Normandy, also known as Operation Overlord. It was June 6, 1944, the beginning of the liberation of Europe and the beginning of the end of World War II.

The invasion succeeded because of several contributing factors: The Allies were quickly able to establish air superiority (the Luftwaffe pilots based nearby were mostly novices). Fighters and bombers tied down German troops near the beaches and blocked German infantry and armor from reinforcing the beachheads. Alerted by coded messages, the French Resistance attacked enemy communications targets and harassed German reserves. At sea the German forces were outgunned, and the few ships commanded by Admiral Theodor Krancke, the commander in chief west, were bombed and strafed before they had even left port.

But many historians agree the most decisive factor was Adolf Hitler. As supreme commander, Hitler was disastrous. Said to consider war a giant game of chess, he often made the wrong moves. Hitler was convinced that the invasion of Normandy was a feint, and that the real invasion would be at Pas de Calais (rejected by the Allies as too heavily defended). Consequently, Hitler's move on June 6 and the days immediately following the invasion was to hold in reserve three Panzer divisions — the tanks field marshals Erwin Rommel and Gerd von Rundstedt were convinced could hold the Allied forces at the beachheads.

Only by quoting numbers can the enormity of the Allied effort on D-Day be realized: The assault was led by three airborne divisions (two American, one British), followed by five assault divisions of American, British, and Canadian troops (some with tank support) landing on five main beaches, to be followed by 15 more divisions, with 21 divisions waiting in reserve in England. The naval forces were massive: two battleships, two monitors, 23 cruisers, 105 destroyers, and 1,076 other warships (including minesweepers, antisubmarine vessels, and patrol torpedo boats). A fleet of 2,727



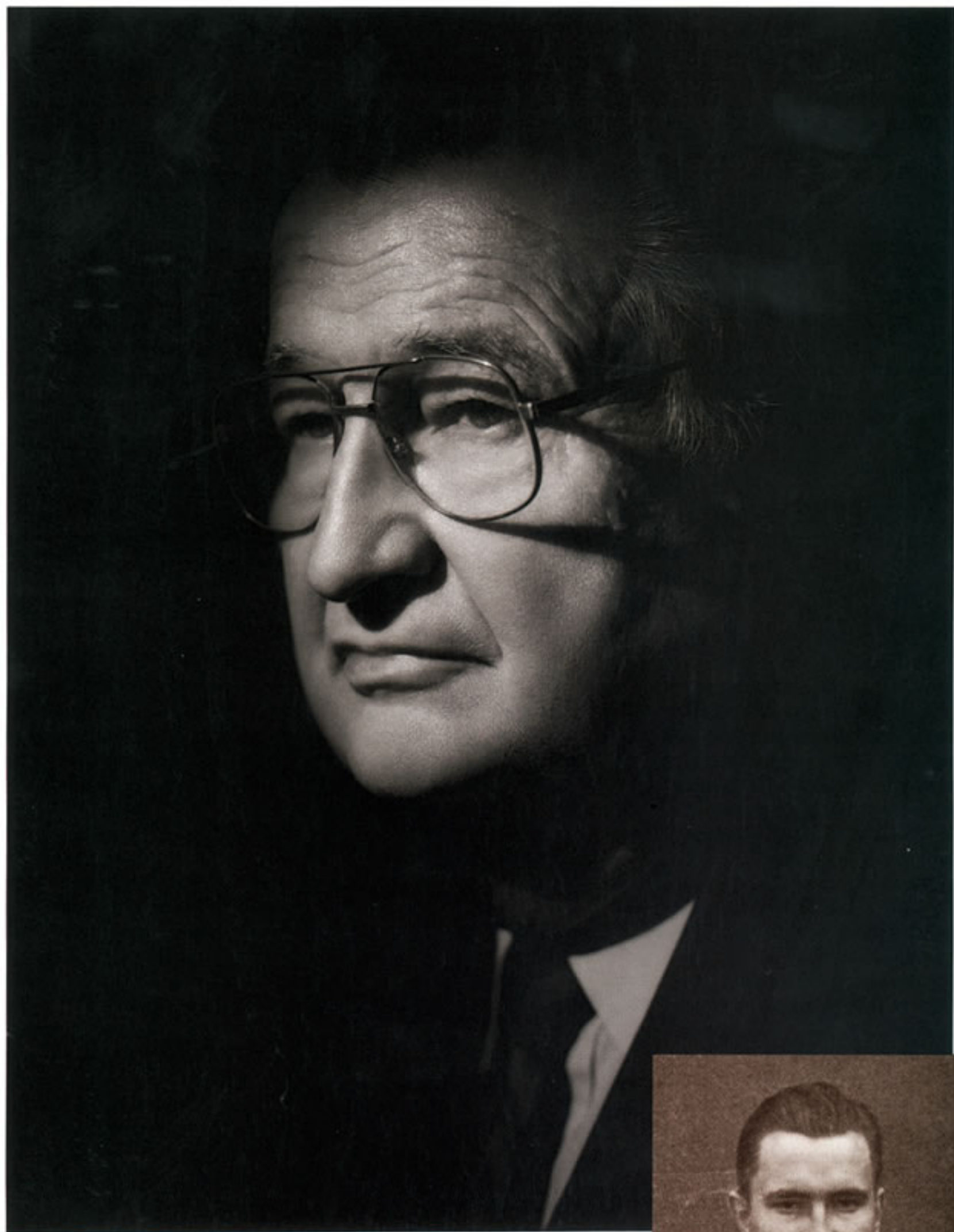
William R. Lawley (left, today) describes how, while wounded and with his crew unable to bail out, he piloted his crippled B-17 bomber through enemy skies back to England. He bellied in on the grass of an airfield south of London (below). For his heroism Lawley was awarded the Medal of Honor (far left).

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merchant ships carried supplies, and 2,606 landing craft ferried troops, armor, and supplies to the beaches. In the air approximately 3,500 heavy bombers and 1,700 light and medium bombers dropped more than 80,000 tons of bombs. Approximately 5,500 fighters defended the fleet, and about 2,400 transport aircraft delivered airborne troops into battle. By nightfall on June 6, some 155,000 men had been landed and were fighting their way through German defenses to nearby French cities such as Caen, Bayeux, and Ste. Mère-Église.

Many Associate Club members were a part of the action on the days before, during, and after the invasion. They piloted the C-47 troop transports that dropped paratroopers on a sleeping German army, sowing the first seeds of the end of the Third Reich. They steered landing craft toward the booming enemy guns of Omaha Beach; and in B-26 Marauder bombers they dodged tracer fire and the black blooms of flak to bomb enemy defenses on Utah Beach. These are the moments they cannot forget, the snatches of history they are reminded of when a small plane flies low overhead, or when a thunderclap booms like artillery — the moments that helped shape who they are 50 years after that historic day. They are all heroes, and these are their stories.



MARK A. VIERA

JOHN O. MOENCH (ABOVE, TODAY) BRAVED BURSTS OF FLAK AND A STORM OF TRACER FIRE TO BOMB UTAH BEACH IN ADVANCE OF THE ALLIED TROOPS. MOENCH WAS FORTUNATE HE NEVER HAD TO USE HIS PHONY GERMAN PASSPORT (RIGHT), BECAUSE THE FAKES WERE EASY TO SPOT: EVERYONE PHOTOGRAPHED FOR THEM WORE THE SAME TIE!



Before the invasion Allied bombers attacked targets in France and Germany, targets directly related to D-Day and others intended to divert attention from the landing sites. John M. Becht, a member of the **Citrus Club** in **Orlando, Florida**, retired from the air force as a lieutenant colonel; but on D-Day he was a 23-year-old second lieutenant, a bombardier aboard a B-17 heavy bomber. He was shot down three times during the war, and after his last bailout over eastern France in September 1944 he left Europe for "safer" duty in the Pacific theater. In the months before D-Day his bomb group hammered German V-1 rocket-bomb launch sites near Calais, France.

Becht joined the service with five fellow students after a dare from his English professor. "I had never intended to be in the army in the first place, and if it hadn't been for that damn professor I wouldn't have gone in," he says. "Before I knew it, I had four kids and 25 years of service, and I could retire as a colonel." Becht says at the time of D-Day he was too young to appreciate its significance. "I was too naïve to be afraid," he says. "The next thing I knew I was in way over my head."

The weather over England and France was often poor, preventing bombers from hitting their targets. As D-Day approached, the Allies became more desperate for a way to bomb in low visibility. Robert C. Lauppe, a member of **Crow Canyon Country Club** in **Danville, California**, was a captain flying B-26 Pathfinders. The plane was a B-26 Marauder bomber fitted with equipment that interpreted transmissions from ground stations in England and enabled them to bomb through overcast clouds or during storms when the bombers could not see the target. "Everybody was anticipating the invasion, and everything we were doing was leading up to it," Lauppe says. "We were bombing bridges, railroad yards, airports, V-1 launch sites, and coastal gun emplacements to limit the ability of the Germans to respond to an invasion."

As it turned out, because the B-26 Pathfinders were configured for bombing from higher altitudes, Lauppe was grounded on D-Day. "Things were a little confusing, and we didn't want to drop until we knew where our troops were



On D-Day Virginia R. Noel (left, today) was Virginia Reed (below), a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps based at a station hospital in England. "D-Day has such vivid memories for me because we courted a lot of those officers," she says.

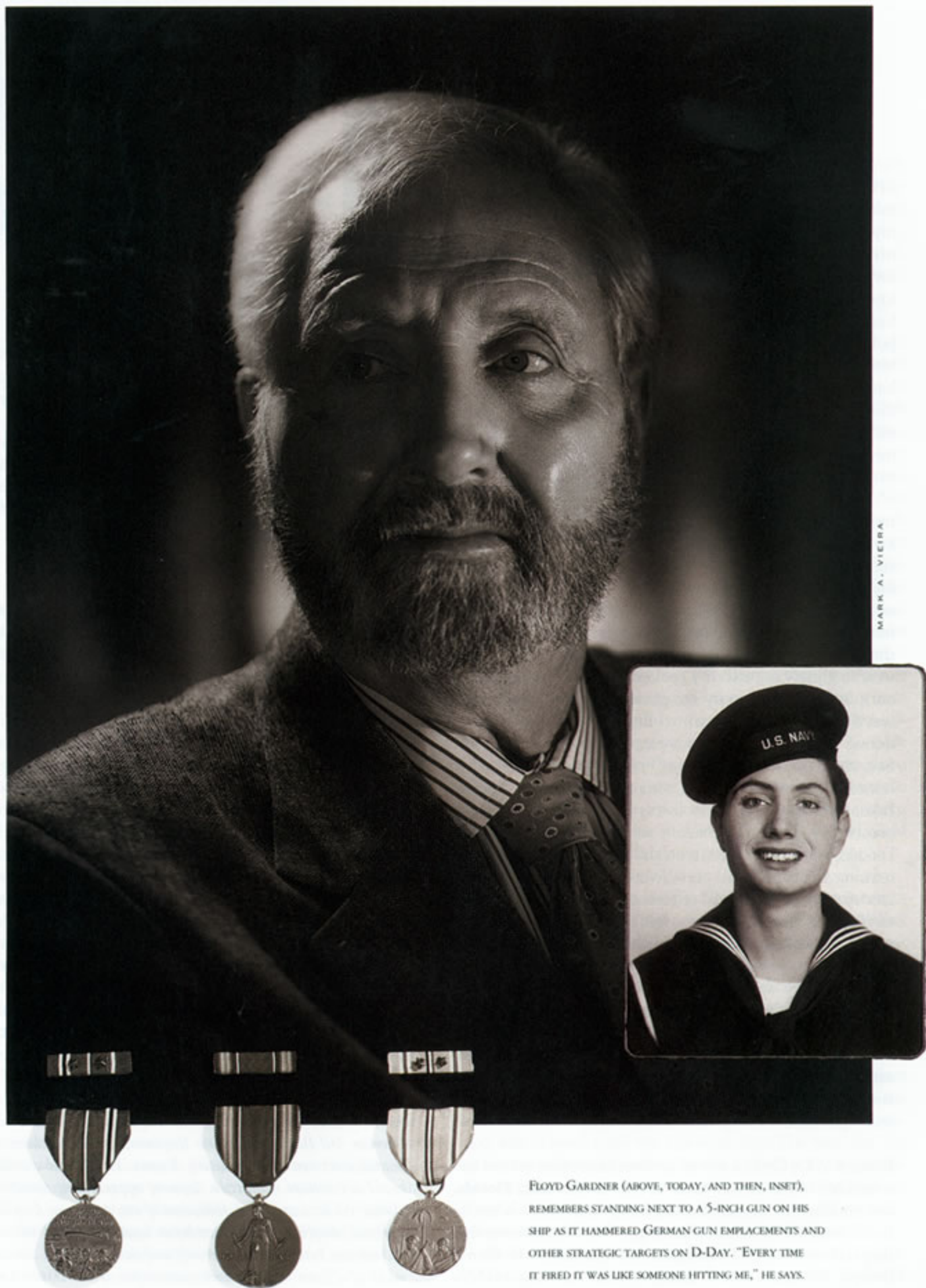


and where the Germans were," he says. "I was disappointed that we couldn't fly. It was the day we had been looking forward to for so long."

Retired Air Force Colonel William R. Lawley (then a first lieutenant at age 23), a member of the **Capital City Club** in **Montgomery, Alabama**, was sure he would fly his B-17 on D-Day. As the assistant squadron operations officer, he was responsible for making out the flight list for June 6. But at the last minute, the squadron operations officer pulled rank: "He told me 'I'm going today. You can fly tomorrow,'" says Lawley. "I wanted to be part of the action." After D-Day he bombed railroad yards and transportation and communication centers. "We were trying to clear everything in advance of the ground forces that were still landing on the 7th," he says.

Although he was disappointed on D-Day, Lawley had had his shining moment on February 20, 1944, the first day of "Big Week." This was the daring seven-day bombing campaign eventually credited with crippling the Luftwaffe and giving the Allies air superiority in Europe. On that day Lawley was on a mission to bomb a fighter factory in Leipzig, Germany.

"It was one of the prettiest days I'd seen," he says. "We reached the target and everything was great until all the planes released their bombs." All that is, but Lawley's. With the bomb racks frozen because of the high altitude, his bombs couldn't be released. Because of the added weight, his bomber quickly fell behind the rest of the formation. "Then the German fighters were on us like a swarm of bees," he says. The tail gunners in the bombers ahead reported that Lawley was attacked by 20 fighters. "I could see the tracers coming at us from the fighters' 20mm cannons," he says.



FLOYD GARDNER (ABOVE, TODAY, AND THEN, INSET), REMEMBERS STANDING NEXT TO A 5-INCH GUN ON HIS SHIP AS IT HAMMERED GERMAN GUN EMPLACEMENTS AND OTHER STRATEGIC TARGETS ON D-DAY. "EVERY TIME IT FIRED IT WAS LIKE SOMEONE HITTING ME," HE SAYS.

"Then a shell hit the windshield, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the copilot put his hands up before falling forward onto the controls, knocking them out of my hand. I reached over and pulled him by the epaulet of his jacket off the controls and back into his seat. He was dead, and his blood covered the windshield and the instrument panel. We went down in a steep spiral."

With one engine on fire, most of the control cables shot away, and his face and his right hand mangled, Lawley fought to control the aircraft as it plunged from 28,000 feet to 12,000 feet. He ordered the crew to bail out, but the entire crew had been wounded (two were so gravely injured they could not bail out). So he decided to fly the plane in. It was a five-hour flight back to England, during which the bomber was plagued by flak, an engine fire, and another enemy fighter attack. After releasing his bombs over an antiaircraft battery in France, Lawley collapsed from blood loss and was revived by the bombardier. He finally made it to a small airfield south of London, where he bellied in on the grass. For his heroism in refusing to abandon his crew (who survived their injuries) Lawley received the Medal of Honor, America's highest military honor. "I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience, but I wouldn't give a plug nickel for it again," he says.

Wherever they were on the morning of June 6, millions of people around the world sat, intent, by their radios, waiting for each update on the progress of the invasion. Evan L. Leaman, M.D., a member of the **Skyline Club** in **Indianapolis**, was 9 years old when he heard the invasion announced by an excited radio commentator. Later he heard that a girl born that day was named Invasia.

Edward V. De Groff, a retired air force lieutenant colonel and a member of the **Tower Club** in **Fort Lauderdale, Florida**, was enrolled in command and general staff school when he heard about the Normandy landings. "We were all sorry that they did not hold off D-Day until we were able to be there," he says. "We sent a wire to Ike saying that the event and how it played was the 'school solution,' and he got an A."



Robert C. Lauppe (left, today, and then, below) was grounded on D-Day. Before the invasion he bombed bridges, rail yards, airports, and coastal gun emplacements in his B-26 Pathfinder (above; Lauppe is second from right) to soften the German resistance.

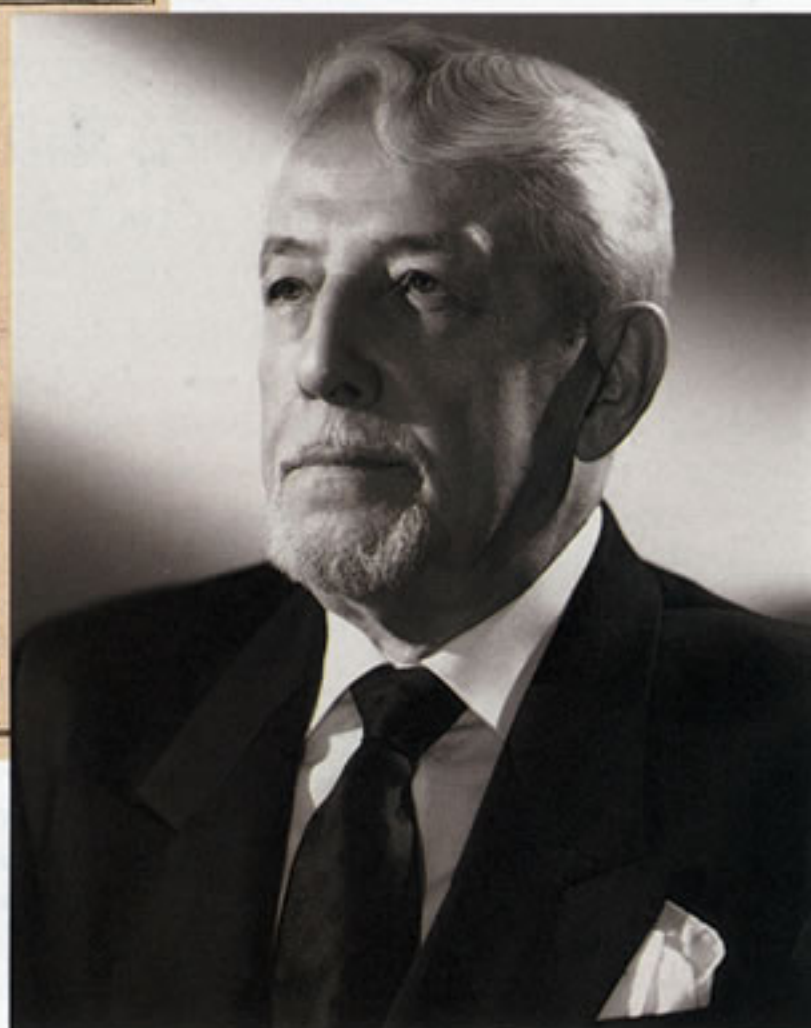
Virginia R. Noel, a member of **Walnut Creek Country Club** in **Mansfield, Texas**, says, "Every year I remember D-Day; I've been thinking about it for 50 years." She was a 22-year-old second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps then. "We crossed the Atlantic on the

Mauretania with the 101st Airborne Division. We were stationed at a hospital in Newbury, England. The paratroopers and glider pilots were all based nearby, and we courted a lot of those men. On the morning of June 6, we heard the drone of all the planes flying overhead, and we knew this was the day everyone had been waiting for. Whenever there was a break in the clouds we could see the planes, hundreds and hundreds of them, all heading for Normandy. We could see the gliders being towed by the C-47s, and the bombers and fighters flying in formation. It was exciting, but also very depressing, because we knew that there were going to be many casualties, and that many of the men we courted weren't coming back. I knew that standing there, watching those planes filled with my friends, all leaving, I was becoming a part of history. And I would be a part of it forever."

At 1:30 a.m. Lieutenant Colonel Hoffmann, commander of the German 3rd Battalion, 919th Regiment, sat in his chair in his headquarters east of Montebourg, France. He walked outside and heard a familiar sound: the drone of approaching squadrons of planes. As he watched, a formation of six American C-47s flew overhead, dropping parachutists before banking toward the east. A few minutes later Hoffmann's staff and security guards were in the midst of a fierce firefight with paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division in one of the opening skirmishes of the battle for Normandy.



John M. Becht (right) was shot down three times during World War II, and his incredible story was immortalized in Ripley's *Believe It or Not!*



MARK A. VIEIRA

Pathfinder troops of the 101st Airborne Division began dropping from C-47s around midnight, and the first groups of combat troops from the 101st and 82nd airborne divisions dropped shortly thereafter. Robert L. de Pinquertaine, a member of **Pinehurst Resort & Country Club** in **North Carolina**, who retired from the army as a captain, was 24 years old and a sergeant in the 101st. As we talk on the telephone there is a bad connection, and de Pinquertaine's voice crackles, fading in and out like a voice from the past, some errant transmission from a radio that hasn't worked for decades.

"We dropped late on the night of June 5," says de Pinquertaine, who was one of the first of the invasion troops to land. "Our mission was to disrupt communications and take out the shore batteries, preparing the beach for the troops who would come in the morning. The field I dropped into had German machine-gun emplacements on either side, firing upward."

When I landed, the first thing I did was reach for my knife. We were not to fire our weapons, but to use our knives on enemy troops. We weren't where we were supposed to be, and I was lucky nobody saw me coming down. It was inky black at the time. We were on the ground for about 20 minutes when the cloud cover disappeared and the moon came out. It was bright, and that made it easier for us to find our way around."

After about 15 minutes de Pinquertaine found a fellow soldier. After rounding up enough men for a squad, they began by destroying telephone lines. "We didn't see much resistance until the next morning," he says. "Then the Panzer divisions came in. We knew they were on the way, and we had the bazooka, with a shaped charge, to deal with them."

In describing the way he felt on that day, the words don't

come so easily to de Pinquertaine. For a moment he struggles with his words. Perhaps it's just the bad connection, but his voice seems to crack with emotion: "It's...it's hard for me to say."

Just a few hours after de Pinquertaine landed, Edward O. Wolcott, a member of **Pebble Creek Country Club** in **Taylors, South Carolina**, piloted a C-47 transport over Normandy, depositing paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne behind enemy lines. It was still dark, and Wolcott (then a 23-year-old first lieutenant) and the rest of the

squadron flew low over the sea. They flew without lights so as not to alert the Germans, who had by then begun to receive scattered reports of their units engaging Allied paratroopers.

"We were flying so low over the Atlantic that the joke was that our airspeed was reading in knots," he says. "Every once in a while a big wave would come along, and I'd pull up a few feet. The pathfinder troops went in first and lit a big 'X' so we knew where to drop. On the way back over the channel you could see the big flashes from the ships' guns lighting up the sky. All the ships were lined up, with maybe 20 of them blasting away. There were so many it looked like you could step from ship to ship all the way back to England."

After a tour in the South Pacific, Floyd Gardner (then a torpedoman third class at 19, and now a member of **Spring Valley Lake Country Club** in **Victorville, California**), was transferred from Pearl Harbor to Boston to serve on the *Forrest*, a destroyer. First his ship went to Ireland, then England, moving to a different port every day to confuse the enemy.

"On the afternoon of June 4, the captain lined us up on the fo'c'sle and told us about the invasion," he says. "That afternoon we started across the English Channel." But for Gardner and the rest of the armada it was a short trip: That night the seas were so rough, the ships were called back and the invasion was delayed until the following day. The next day the weather wasn't much better. "It was so bad, a lot of the soldiers were really sick," he says. "The powers that be were afraid that we had tipped our hand on June 5, and we really had no other choice but to go. We couldn't wait forever."

On the night of June 5 they were off the Normandy coast. "Our original mission was to pick up fire-control parties of frogmen who had gone ashore earlier to spot gun emplace-

“**T**hey announced that all hands were to shower and shave. Then they served us steaks with all the trimmings, like they were fattening us up for the kill.”⁹⁹

ments,” says Gardner, before pausing. “We didn’t pick anyone up. To this day I don’t know what happened to them. Around midnight, planes filled with the 82nd and 101st airborne divisions were flying over us, towing gliders.

“At 6:30 a.m. the invasion started. We were close to the battleships *Texas* and *Nevada*, off Utah Beach, and the rest of our squadron, another three destroyers. Our sister ship, the *Corry*, wandered too close to shore, struck some mines, and then the German 88mm guns sunk it. It was incredibly loud. I was standing next to a 5-inch gun, and every time it fired it was like someone hitting me. We had different targets throughout the day: churches [used by German troops for gun emplacements], trucks, and bridges.

“It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me, a moment that I’m very proud of,” says Gardner. “It was the beginning of the end of the war, and I was there to see it.”

John O. Moench (a member of **Errol Country Club** in **Apopka, Florida**) retired from the air force as a major general, but on D-Day he was a 23-year-old first lieutenant piloting a B-26 Marauder. “We knew this was going to be the day where we went in and whipped Hitler’s ass,” he says. “When the word went out that this was it, there were cheers and yells for five minutes.” On June 6 Moench’s mission was to bomb Utah Beach. “We were to blow up German defenses, set off mines, and create sheltering holes for our troops,” he says. “We dropped down to about 4,000 feet, and as we headed downward toward the coast we saw long streams of tracer fire rising to meet us. Soon the tracer fire was all around us, but we kept going. Finally the signal came to open the bomb bay doors. In minutes, from every aircraft in the formation, two tons of bombs dropped toward the earth to scour the beaches directly in front of the advancing infantry.”

In the early morning of June 6 the first wave of gliders landed in the dark, in unfamiliar territory. Many of the troops aboard them, commandos meant to infiltrate the German lines and disrupt communications, didn’t make it. Their gliders crashed into farmhouses, trees, or landed in swamps.

Charles J. Mahan was a 22-year-old flight officer when he was told that he would pilot a British Horsa loaded with 30 glider troops on the morning of the invasion. “I went in on the second wave,” says Mahan, a member of **Quail Valley Country Club** in **Missouri City, Texas**. “The first wave went in the night before, and they got all splattered up. When we went in, we had been briefed and had specific fields to go to.”

But there was a hitch: On the runway before takeoff Mahan and the other glider pilots were told their landing spots had been changed. “They showed us a map and said that after we were released from the tow plane to follow this thin road and ‘find a spot,’” he says.

In the rear of the glider the troops of the 17th Airborne Division were quiet. Only the rush of the wind, the creak of the wings, and the booms of the artillery below broke the silence. Mahan was amazed at the scope of the invasion: “All we could see on the water below was boats,” he says. “There was more navy down there than we knew there was in the world.”

Omaha Beach was the site of the fiercest fighting on D-Day. Underwater obstructions (many topped by mines) made getting to the beach difficult. But there were other problems: British intelligence informed the U.S. First Army Command that the Germans had brought in the crack 352nd Division. But the Americans thought the information was suspect and had not informed the troops. General Omar Bradley, for whatever reason, rejected British offers of the “Funnies,” an assortment of tanks (including amphibious, flame-throwing, bridge-laying, and mine-detonating models) developed and offered by British General Percy Hobart. Of the few amphibious tanks Bradley did accept, most were swamped when they were unloaded too far offshore and then sank. And most bombers, sent to bomb the beach and the German positions beyond, missed their targets. “They missed the goddamn target by two miles,” says Moench. “That’s why there were so many casualties at Omaha. The Germans were probably wondering what the hell we were doing.”

Ray P. Johnson was a 23-year-old coast guard coxswain when he looked out the open door of his landing craft into the swirling waters off the Normandy coast, a scene etched in the minds of the soldiers who were there and those who saw the famous photograph on the cover of the May 28, 1984, issue of *Time* (see inset, page 43). On D-Day, based on the transport ship *Samuel Chase*, Johnson’s job was to deliver part of the elite 1st Infantry Division, the “Big Red One,” to the bloodiest fight he would ever see: the landing on Omaha Beach. It was not the only invasion for Johnson, who also took part in landings on Sicily, on July 10, 1943; Salerno, Italy, on September 9, 1943; and in southern France on August 15, 1944.

“On the night of June 5 we were just out of Portland, England, when they announced that all hands were to shower and shave,” says Johnson, a member of **Fair Oaks Ranch Golf & Country Club** in **Boerne, Texas**. “Then they served us steaks with all the trimmings, like they were fattening us up for the kill. It was about 6:30 a.m. when we reached the beach. We followed an LCI [landing craft, infantry] in. We came in at low tide, when the mines and barricades were exposed. We got in as close as we could, then let the ramp down. We got the troops onto the beach and backed off.”

Bullets whizzed by, smacking into the sand. Incoming artillery shells whistled like banshees, their explosions blooming like terrible flowers. The whump, whump of the exploding shells sometimes jarred the vision of the soldiers on the beach, who dug in as best they could, hoping the ships would

target the German gun emplacements. Smoke from exploding shells and Allied smoke canisters enshrouded the beach in gray and black fog. "There was a lot of shell-fire coming onto the beach," says Johnson. "The Germans were firing off the nearby hills. Machine-gun fire and mortar fire were hitting the water where we were. The Germans were ready, and they were firing at us practically point-blank. The German resistance was fierce, and the troops, digging in, were pinned down. We thought we might have to go in there and take them back out, but eventually they made it up to the cliffs on the beach. After we got back to the ship, we were given orders to return to the beach to pick up the wounded men from other ships. Then we ferried the wounded for the rest of the day."

"I'll never forget going over there on the night of June 5, seeing all the ships in the channel, seeing everything headed toward the beach," says Johnson. "It was unbelievable that I was a part of it."

Dr. George P. Trodella went to medical school to be an obstetrician and gynecologist. But on June 6, as a 28-year-old amphibious medical officer in the U.S. Navy, he treated the wounded off Omaha Beach. "We were physicians, they needed us, and I said, 'So be it,'" says Trodella, a member of the **Tower Club** in **Fort Lauderdale, Florida**.

Trodella's ship, LST 369 [landing ship, tank; for transporting tanks and other heavy equipment], carried assault troops trained on the beaches of Slapton Sands near the coast of Devon, England. "Our original orders were to hold back and wait our turn to let out the troops," he says. "But we were told to break rank and go in first because the first battalion to reach the beach [the 1st Army Infantry] had been shot to pieces. I was thinking, 'This is it!'"



Charles J. Mahan (left, today) flew training gliders state-side (below left) before getting his wings (below) and heading to England, where he delivered troops in a British Horsa glider on D-Day.

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Trodella was terrified, and rightly so. "There were planes flying all around above us, ships all around us, and there were bodies floating on the surface of the water, interspersed with thousands of jellyfish," he says. "There was a lot of noise from the planes, the shooting, and the bombardment. We had a German 88mm gun stepping its way toward our ship with each salvo, and a destroyer to our right couldn't knock it out. Then a cruiser moved in, and after about three salvos the German gun was gone."

But Trodella couldn't dwell on the danger, and turned immediately to treating the wounded. "I took off my .45-caliber pistol and my chemical suit — I couldn't do anything with that equipment on — and I started to work on these people," he says. "There was blood everywhere. The first man I treated was from a small boat delivering soldiers that went around the bow of our ship and was blown up. He was the only man left. I had to make quick decisions about who I could save. If someone had a severe head wound I couldn't do anything about it. We put them on stretchers on the tank deck of the LST — that was the waiting room — and strung wires back and forth across the ship to hold fluids and transfusion lines. We performed surgery in the mess hall."

"I saw healthy young men in a situation where I knew a lot of them weren't going to come back," says Trodella. "And a

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WE WERE THERE

Continued from page 51

lot of them didn't — especially where I was. I feel good about the fact that we were able to do what we were supposed to do, but I would hate like the devil to see something like it happen again."

William S. Neel (now a member of the **Tower Club at Charlotte Plaza** in **Charlotte, North Carolina**), was a 22-year-old naval ensign aboard LST 542 on the afternoon of June 6. His ship was anchored in the waters off Juno Beach. "As the communications officer, my battle station was on the bridge," he says. "When we went in it was pretty hot, primarily from German fighters bombing the ships. It was chaos. You were trying to stay out of the way of your own ships as well as trying to shoot down the enemy planes."

Fortunately, the ships at Juno weren't on their own: "The British fighters were always there, and we were always glad to see the Spitfires," says Neel. His tour of duty was a long one. "After the initial invasion we took equipment to the other beaches," he says. "I went to all of them. We were the last LST to leave the United Kingdom, in July 1945."

According to Moench, it wasn't very often that a man flew more than one mission a day. On D-Day bombardier Cleve L. Atkins, now a member of the **Citrus Club** in **Orlando, Florida**, flew three missions in a B-24 Liberator bomber named *Apassionata*, after the character from the Li'l Abner comic strip. "We knew something big was coming down," says Atkins, who was only 18 years old on D-Day. "Whether we were scheduled to fly or not, we had to leave word as to where we were going to be if we left base, in the event that the MPs needed to come and find us and send us back to base. And that did happen, actually. One morning at 2 a.m. we were called to a briefing, and they told us we'd be flying sorties all day long, around the clock. When we got to the flight line they had just painted the invasion stripes on the planes, and the paint was still wet when we left the ground."

Still, Atkins was terrified, and he wasn't alone: "Anyone who says he

wasn't frightened going out on a mission is telling a story," he says. "The Germans shot 88mm guns at us. Those were the finest antiaircraft guns at the time. There was lot of confusion, a lot of black puffs of smoke from the flak. When the bursts started breaking red, we got nervous because that meant they were extremely close. There weren't any foxholes in the sky."

“The Germans shot 88mm guns at us. When the flak bursts started breaking red, we got nervous because that meant they were extremely close. There weren't any foxholes in the sky.”

Atkins says he doesn't often think about D-Day, but sometimes the memories catch him by surprise. "Seven years ago I took my wife to London," he says. "I made arrangements for a driver to drive us to my old air base. It was a rainy day. The runways were all grown over, and it had been turned into a turkey farm. There was a monument there to the 489th Bomb Group."

"We had lunch in a pub in Halesworth where we used to go when we were on leave. Then everything flashed back: I could hear the planes warming up in the dark on the runway, and I could see the sergeant coming into our mission hut with a flashlight, going down the list of who was going to fly. I was lying there, and it was cold as hell. He shone his flashlight into my eyes and said, 'Atkins. Eat at 2, brief at 3. Get up. It's time to go.'"

Associate Editor Edward Pittman studied World War II from childhood through college. He says it was an honor to interview the heroes in this story.

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Continued from page 55

with canning her putt from 15 feet. It was his daughter. She was 6 years old. *That* was mass humiliation."

But Marshall says he intends to keep competing and, he hopes, getting better and better. So what is this fervent competitor's sage advice for how to prepare for competition? "My recommendation is this," he laughs. "Get out to the course about an hour early, hit a dozen balls, then walk around and joke with everybody. It may be the only fun you have all day."

SET YOUR OWN GOALS

Inverrary pro John Nelson advises, "I think you should set a goal, and make sure it coincides with what you're realistically capable of accomplishing. You have to consider not only your skill, but how much time you are willing and able to practice. If your level of skill is somewhere in the middle of the pack and you delude yourself into thinking you should win, you are putting way too much pressure on yourself. You may get frustrated, and very likely you won't perform up to your capabilities."

Rod Curl warns of overpreparing and suggests that you shouldn't hit too many balls or think so much about the tournament that your thoughts become worries. Richard Mosman says you should concentrate on tempo more than anything. "You can get away with a lot if you keep your backswing slow and stay very relaxed in the shoulders, arms, and hands," he says. Nelson says that once you've prepared and you're on the course, play one shot at a time and "just let it happen."

There are nearly as many theories as there are dimples on a golf ball, but almost every experienced competitor agrees that tournaments can bring out the best in your game. And they can be fun, rewarding, and a genuine thrill.

So if you're nervously awaiting a competition, don't despair. Prepare carefully, but also try to have some fun. After all, it's like a road map: Once you know how to get where you want to go, the trip may be much more exciting than you ever imagined. ●

Dan Gleason, a 7-handicapper, is an Atlanta freelance writer who competes sporadically and admits that, in his first tournament as a youngster, he got sick on the 3rd green.